

Last Mile Initiative

USAID has Last Mile Initiatives (LMI) in more than twenty-five countries. The “last mile” refers to making information and communication technologies, in particular the Internet, accessible by people presently beyond the reach of existing communications networks.

USAID/Sri Lanka has contracted Strategic Synergies Group (SSG), based in Vermont, to develop 20-30 Internet access sites in communities presently without affordable Internet access. The centers will provide computer classes and affordable telephone services and Internet access to rural communities in Sri Lanka. The USAID/Sri Lanka LMI project is a private sector model. The LMI project started in Sept., 2006. To date SSG has:

- Analyzed various technologies for economically delivering Internet to remote sites
- Creating a business plan that demonstrates a financially sustainable model for establishing Internet access centers in rural areas in Sri Lanka
- Recruited contributions of cash, expertise, software and hardware that will match the USAID investment dollar for dollar. Participating companies include Dialog Telekom, Qualcomm, IBM, Microsoft, National Development Bank, and Lanka Orix Leasing Company.

In the remaining months of the project, SSG will:

- Open first two centers in May
- Assist partners (principally from the private sector) to operate 20-30 centers
- Train center operators in offering various educational programs at the centers such as English instruction and curricula developed by the USAID/Sri Lanka workforce development program
- Disseminate information on the model and the results of the 20-30 centers’ operation so that other private firms will replicate the model.

Internet access centers designed for educational purposes have the potential to overcome economic and social isolation by transforming the development prospects of rural areas through IT-driven increases in productivity. The LMI is designed to support broader USAID/SL Mission objectives such as competitiveness, rural development, workforce development, and peace & democracy.

LMI Project Deliverables

By project’s end, the following deliverables will have been achieved:

- At least 20 and up to 30 LMI Center Franchisees operating on a profitable (sustainable) basis offering broadband and content services to rural customers without regard to gender, ethnic or religious affiliation;
- LMI Center franchising entity established and covering costs through fees charged to franchisees;
- ‘LMI Center in a Box’ franchise model fully developed, piloted and marketed to entrepreneurs, strategic investors and financial institutions;
- Not less than \$300,000 leveraged from broadband and content providers as well as franchisees.

Other ways in which USAID/SL deploys Information Technology as an enabler in workforce development and vocational education

USAID/SL recognizes the importance of IT both as a goal of education (IT skills are needed by a competitive workforce) and a means of education (computers as tools in instruction.) USAID/SL has various programs that develop computer literacy of students and instructors:

- The [Sri Lanka](#) Tsunami Reconstruction Program ([SL](#)TRP) will help the Vocational Training Authority, private training firms, NGOs and other educational institutions develop their students' computer literacy and their instructor's competency in using IT in the classroom. This project has already implemented a survey of specific IT skills needed by various employment sectors in Sri Lanka.
- The Workforce Development program (called the Accelerated Skills Acquisition Program, or ASAP) will develop IT skills in A-level graduates in short courses and in some cases, assist teachers in using IT in their instruction
- English as a Second Language software with voice recognition and feedback has been distributed to a network of eight Sri Lankan training institutions
- USAID/SL funded the 2005 and 2007 *Geared for Growth* National ICT Labor Supply and Demand research reports
- The Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) has funded various computer-based education programs in Tsunami-affected areas.